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## **SOME PROBLEMS OF ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S 'EMOTIVISM THESIS'**

Alasdair MacIntyre's thesis about emotivistic character of contemporary liberal culture is one of the most renowned ideas in contemporary political philosophy. MacIntyre's critics who try to disprove it often tend to focus either on showing that liberal principles should be considered rational, or on arguing that MacIntyre's own notion of rationality is unworkable since morality of virtues and deserts is viable only in small-scale communities and cannot be put into practice on the national level nowadays. However, in this article I would like to give attention to the very logic of MacIntyre's argument and to contend that it is incoherent in a few points. First, his argumentation on the origin of emotive use of moral utterances seems to be partially self-refuting since the 'discussion halt' premise is at odds with his other assumptions – existence of widespread emotive influence and objective meaning of moral language. Second, MacIntyre's claim that moral debates in liberal state cannot be rendered rational is based on the assumption of incommensurability of comprehensive doctrines embraced by the participants of such debates. This assumption seems to be in conflict with his own characterization of liberal individual and liberal debate, though. Third, even if the above doubts can be assuaged, the very characterisation of incommensurability in liberal debate is questionable.

### **Emotivism as the theory of use**

Speaking very generally, the emergence of emotivism in Western culture results, in MacIntyre's opinion, from the fact that rational moral

debate has become impossible. The rationality of such a debate is possible only when the functional conception of a human being has its prominent place and sufficient viability in a society. It requires that a human being is to a large extent perceived as identical to its roles; these roles are a part of larger social structures and this endows them with meaning and significance. The good of the community cannot be confronted here with the good of the individual since both of these goods are strongly interrelated, being to large extent identical (because the goals of the individual are necessarily identical with the goals of the community). Moral 'ought' has unambiguous factual character since it defines how to achieve this type of good. 'It is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that "man" ceases to be a functional concept' [MacIntyre, 2007, 59]. It makes the notion of desert – and what follows the very notion of justice – unworkable and pointless. The idea that it is possible to confer rationality upon moral valuations in any radically other way is a delusion, the one to which the Enlightenment had succumbed.

One of the main sources of emotivism is the incommensurability of the arguments being adduced in debates over morality and justice. Such an incommensurability stems partially from the fact that these arguments include moral notions taken from various moral traditions which are not kindred enough to be easily compared in order to weight their claims. But what is also important is that these arguments include moral fictions [MacIntyre, 2007, 64–71]. Moral fictions are the notions like 'rights' or 'utility' that come mainly from various modern political-ethical theories. They do not and never have possessed any clear meaning since they have never been based on the practice coherent enough to provide such a meaning. Therefore, arguments derived from the larger theoretical frameworks aiming at rational justification of morality are almost never able to ultimately persuade those taking part in a dispute. Because of lack of practical basing they are ineluctably incommensurable<sup>1</sup>. In spite of that 'almost everyone, philosopher and non-philosopher alike, continues to speak and write as if one of these projects had succeeded. And hence derives one of the features of contemporary moral discourse [...], the gap between the meaning of moral expressions and the ways in which they are put to use. For the

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<sup>1</sup> We will attend the problem of incommensurability in a more detailed way later on.

meaning is and remains such as would have been warranted only if at least one of the philosophical projects had been successful; but the use, the emotivist use, is precisely what one would expect if the philosophical projects had all failed' [MacIntyre, 2007, 68]. MacIntyre puts forward a thesis that emotivism, understood as the sociological phenomenon (using moral utterances in an emotivist way), is the result of our persistent inability to persuade others by means of rational arguments. In effect, when we make a moral judgement we do nothing more than expressing our feelings and likings while arguments that we adduce become merely rhetorical tools which are meant to influence feelings and attitudes of others. The difference with meta-ethical emotivism is visible here, however. The objective meaning of moral utterances, our confidence in existence of impersonal standards of evaluation is still present (even if it is not completely undeterred), whereas according to Stevensonian, emotivism moral sentences do mean roughly 'I approve of this, do so as well' [Stevenson, 1965, 20–36].

It seems then that one is able to fall into emotivism in two ways, either partly deliberately or inadvertently. In the first case, if the arguments I would normally adduce are deemed rational only by me but not by my opponent, I may want to induce her to take the position that I consider rational by means of arguments which are irrational in the light of my own stance, but which turn out to be effective nevertheless. Then in order to attain my goal I extend the objective meaning on all of my utterances, but since this step is invalid I use them emotively, even if I try to persuade somebody to embrace a position which I sincerely consider rational. It might look relatively innocuous but in effect the relevance of the criteria of rationality which I use may be harder and harder to grasp; hence distinction between rationality and irrationality may become obliterated even if I am convinced that it is not the case. 'To a large degree people now think, talk and act as if emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be' [MacIntyre, 2007, 22], claims MacIntyre. The second case, however, is more interesting since falling into emotivism inadvertently reflects the way in which moral reasoning and practice in Western culture is gradually degrading. It is worth mentioning that when MacIntyre describes the situation of the individual he is always, at least partially, referring to the situation of the whole culture since the rationality of each individual is mediated in cultural content.

Unconscious falling into emotivism implies that objective meaning can conceal the emotive use also for the speaker. "The agent himself might well be among those for whom use was concealed by meaning. He might well, precisely because he was self-conscious about the meaning of the words that he used, be assured that he was appealing to independent impersonal criteria, when all that he was in fact doing was expressing his feelings to others in a manipulative way" [MacIntyre, 2007, 14]. We are presented here with the peculiar notion of inadvertently exercised manipulation which in fact amounts to emotive use of moral utterances. MacIntyre's description of manipulation is couched in terms associated usually with deliberate actions such as 'attempting to influence' and 'in a manipulative way' while he assumes at the same time that manipulation is not necessarily deliberate but it is 'what we are in fact doing' [MacIntyre, 2007, 13–14]. How is it possible?

The proper (non-emotivist) use of moral utterances implies the compliance of their use with their meaning. MacIntyre explicitly assumes the Fregean conception of the meaning [MacIntyre, 2007, 13]<sup>2</sup>; when somebody communicates a certain meaning she refers at the same time to what she means. Accordingly, when what she means is objective criterion of moral valuation she wants to refer to such criterion. But as such criteria are unavailable she cannot do that, although she might have thought otherwise. MacIntyre shows that in places where emotivism emerges the fundamental breakdown of rational moral debate ensuing from a decline of shared impersonal criteria had taken place beforehand. As a result, when participants reach incompatible and incommensurable premises, the actual debate ceases and becomes mere uttering of assertions and counter-assertions [MacIntyre, 2007, 8]. Such debates start to seem irresolvable which casts doubt on their rationality. It is obvious for MacIntyre that such a doubt affects not only arguments of our opponents but also of our own.

'If we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by means of which we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we can have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good

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<sup>2</sup> It seems possible to reconcile many of MacIntyre's statements with Wittgensteinian conception of meaning, however. Of course we would not like to preclude the possibility that these two different perspectives on linguistic meaning can be treated as complementary to some extent rather than contradictory.

reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there must be some non-rational decision to adopt that position. Corresponding to the interminability of public argument there is at least the appearance of a disquieting private arbitrariness' [MacIntyre, 2007, 8].

Yet, in his opinion we tend to avoid such a disquieting conclusion as 'we simultaneously and inconsistently treat moral argument as an exercise of our rational powers and as mere expressive assertion' [MacIntyre, 2007, 11].

### **Some problems with MacIntyre's thesis:**

#### **1. Emotive influence**

So far, so good, but when we look closer at MacIntyre's argumentation we might come to a conclusion that it is partially self-refuting. Let us bear in mind that the emotive influence either has to be exerted consciously (or, more precisely: there needs to be at least conscious attempts, even if they are unsuccessful) or it has to effectively occur since talking about inadvertent attempts of influence which do not succeed seems to be utterly pointless. But if, according to MacIntyre, one of the main features of contemporary moral argument is that apparent debates very quickly turn into mere expression of opposite positions [MacIntyre, 2007, 9], is it not a vivid sign that it is quite difficult to influence the attitudes of others? Apparently the more emphasis we put on the lack of moral agreement and being entrenched on preconceived positions, which is the key factor in the emergence of emotivism, the more we challenge the thesis of emotive use of moral utterances because we give less credit to emotive influence on the attitudes of others.

If MacIntyre's thesis is to retain credibility, this kind of influence just has to occur. It seems that the Scottish philosopher points at that kind of phenomena right after discussing the perceived idleness of arguing.

The self-assertive shrillness of protest arises because the facts of incommensurability ensure that protestors can never win an argument; the indignant self-righteousness of protest arises because the facts of incommensurability ensure equally that the protestors can never lose an argument either. Hence the utterance of protest is

characteristically addressed to those who already share the protestors' premises. The effects of incommensurability ensure that protestors rarely have anyone else to talk to but themselves. This is not to say that protest cannot be effective; it is to say that it cannot be rationally effective and that its dominant modes of expression give evidence of a certain perhaps unconscious awareness of this' [MacIntyre, 2007, 71].

However it is at the same time obvious that this kind of influence is very much irregular and exerted with random frequency. Too great of a regularity and frequency would contradict MacIntyre's diagnosis and imply that moral discourse is perfectly rational since arguments would mostly achieve their goal. Therefore, either emotive influence has to occur quite often but in basically uncoordinated and random way or it has to be relatively well coordinated but occur quite rarely. But here we encounter another problem: how to explain the fact that objective meaning of moral language is so persistent? Why do we still believe in existence of reliable impersonal standards even though – as MacIntyre claims – they are long gone<sup>3</sup>? It is worth remembering that in MacIntyre's view the meaning of moral sentences is rooted in moral practice. Thus, either such a practice clearly cannot be as barren as it is imputed by MacIntyre or the objective meaning is far from being unshakeable. Yet, MacIntyre firmly asserts that it is first and foremost the use that is defective which is nevertheless covered by the pretence of objective meaning.

It seems then that MacIntyre needs some other way to show that arguments put forward in contemporary moral debates should not be considered rational since argumentation based on 'discussion halt' premise is prone to self-refutation. I think that MacIntyre gives that kind of answer claiming that the rational solution of political and moral debates should consist in finding which of comprehensive conceptions of the good is truth. Yet, in liberal debates every agent is forced to abstract from these comprehensive doctrines which are premises of his reasoning and is only allowed to present its conclusions. Aforementioned moral fictions cannot be of much help since they are to a large extent kind of empty vessels filled with such incompatible conclusions. Thus, liberal debates are necessarily inconclusive since

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<sup>3</sup> This problem is mentioned by Steven Mulhall [Mulhall, 1994, 217–220].

there are incommensurable premises at the root of every argument but the agent is never allowed to introduce them; even if these debates happen to be temporarily conclusive still they are not rational since they do not aim at truth but only at some provisional series of agreements. I would not want to discuss here an important but yet highly controversial matter: how comprehensive does a doctrine have to be to earn the name of potentially truth and rational? Let us focus on other, more 'structural' problems instead. I believe that even if we put aside the fact that on these assumption preserving the objective meaning of moral utterances still remains dubious<sup>4</sup>, further questions arise.

## **2. Comprehensive theories as premises**

MacIntyre seems to assume that individuals cling to their own comprehensive conceptions of good (or at least coherent set of principles) as the premises of their arguments for specific conceptions of liberal justice<sup>5</sup>. Yet, what makes this assumption questionable is in

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<sup>4</sup> Let us cite an important passage: 'What each standpoint supplies is a set of premises from which its proponents argue to conclusions about what ought or ought not to be done, conclusions which are often in conflict with those of other groups. The only rational way in which these disagreements could be resolved would be by means of a philosophical enquiry aimed at deciding which out of the conflicting sets of premises, if any, is true. But a liberal order, as we have already seen, is one in which each standpoint may make its claims but can do no more within the framework of the public order, since no overall theory of the human good is to be regarded as justified. At this level debate is necessarily barren; rival appeals to accounts of the human good or of justice necessarily assume a rhetorical form such that it is as assertion and counterassertion, rather than as argument and counterargument, that rival standpoints confront one another. Nonrational persuasion displaces rational argument. Standpoints are construed as the expressions of attitude and feeling and often enough come to be no more than that' [MacIntyre, 1988, 342-343].

<sup>5</sup> 'What then is the function and notion of justice in such a cultural and social order? The answer to this question requires attention to four different levels of activity and debate in the structure of a liberal and individualist order. The first is that at which different individuals and groups express their views and attitudes in their own terms, whatever these may be. Some of these individuals or groups may be members of synagogues or churches or mosques and express their views as injunctions to obey divine law. Some may be adherents of some nonreligious, say Aristotelian or quasi-Aristotelian, theory of the human good. Others again may espouse principles concerning, for example, universal human rights, which they simply treat as not

the first instance his own account of the average member of the contemporary society whose beliefs are deeply inconsistent<sup>6</sup>. Thus, if it is hard to speak in most cases about person being guided by coherent set of rules, MacIntyre's diagnosis, which – as I read it – in a large part is based on the assumption of incommensurability of fundamental principles which guide our reasoning, is endangered. The very existence of these principles is in fact put into question since their original contexts have been mostly lost [MacIntyre, 2007, 19–40]. The apparent irresolvability of moral debates seems to be the result of general difficulty of employing coherent argumentation – ergo: moral disorder – rather than incompatibility of coherent sets of principles. MacIntyre could probably respond: those are of course historical processes with continua; currently the Western world is already to a larger extent populated with emotivist agents with defunct moral compasses even though they are still in possession of – incessantly diminishing – remnants of rationality they are unable to use properly; what they should do is to find which tradition of rational moral inquiry defines them best and give to that tradition their full allegiance, because only then they will be able to conduct further inquiry that will show which of these tradition is – even if only temporarily – the bearer of the truth, the truth which is nevertheless eternal; still it is incommensurability which is the at the root of emotivism, however. This latter remark will be discussed a bit later.

Yet, there is another reason to be suspicious about the assumption of different comprehensive theories standing as premises. MacIntyre contends that

'initially the liberal claim was to provide a political, legal, and economic framework in which assent to one and the same set of rationally justifiable principles would enable those who espouse widely different and incompatible conceptions of the good life for human beings to live together peaceably within the same society, enjoying the same political status and engaging in the same economic relationships. Every individual is to be equally free to propose and to live by whatever conception of the good he or she pleases, derived from whatever theory or tradition he or she may adhere to, unless

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requiring further grounding. What each standpoint supplies is a set of premises from which its proponents argue to conclusions about what ought or ought not to be done, conclusions which are often in conflict with those of other groups' [MacIntyre, 1988, 342].

<sup>6</sup> See [MacIntyre, 1988, 397].



that conception of the good involves reshaping the life of the rest of the community in accordance with it' [MacIntyre, 1988, 335–336].

Thus, it seems unintelligible why one would persist in using in such a debate basically the same arguments and concepts that result in the incompatibility that brings about the very necessity of this debate. It seems also questionable that while debating on liberal justice we are really unable to formulate any kind of argument based on coherent and reflective liberal social practice. MacIntyre seem to picture the world in which various groups with strongly incompatible and incommensurable beliefs had encountered to establish terms of coexistence. Yet, it is in fact a liberal picture which is surely somewhat misleading. To criticize MacIntyre's picture one could possibly use very similar argument to the one that he puts up against John Rawls [MacIntyre, 2007, 247–251]. As we are never behind the veil of ignorance, accordingly there are never only separated groups that have distinct conceptions of good and not much more in common. Rather we always have some sort of experience and knowledge of the previous relations between such groups which gives direction to our investigations and debates. MacIntyre's picture implies that political liberalism is somewhat sudden and unprecedented phenomenon. Yet, his own account of piecemeal decay of Thomistic moral scheme since approximately XIV century [MacIntyre, 1990, 149–169] suggests that liberal character of social bonds had been developing gradually with liberal theory being the expression of extending and consolidating practice rather than abstract anthropological insight, which is of course a rather trivial observation nowadays.

MacIntyre could probably retort that early liberal societies not only wanted to live peaceably together but in the long run they wanted to live fully rational lives having discarded vestiges of – only temporarily unavoidable – prejudices, which would amount to realizing 'the project of founding a form of social order in which individuals could emancipate themselves from the contingency and particularity of tradition by appealing to genuinely universal, tradition-independent norms' [MacIntyre, 1988, 335]. Their initial position is actually very similar to ours and is best described as conceptual melange: 'all those various concepts which inform our moral discourse ['virtue', 'justice', 'piety', 'duty', 'ought'] were originally at home in larger totalities of

theory and practice in which they enjoyed a role and function supplied by contexts of which they have now been deprived' [MacIntyre, 2007, 10]. According to MacIntyre, the main task of Enlightenment and the following projects up to 20th century was to find the set of principles which would rationally decide between rival claims and introduce order into the language of morals. But that kind of project was at the start doomed to failure because of its individualistic premises. As MacIntyre puts it,

individuals are [...] primary and society secondary, and the identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them. But we have already seen that the notion of desert is at home only in the context of a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding both of the good for man and of the good of that community and where individuals identify their primary interests with reference to those goods' [MacIntyre, 2007, 250].

Therefore, various liberal theories – utilitarian, contractarian, Kantian and those based on natural rights – ineluctably miss their aim since they express incommensurable points of view. What needs emphasis is the fact that it is not only a predicament of philosophers. 'The interminable disagreements between [philosophical theories] give expression to a set of conflicting principles presupposed in the institutionalized life of individualist societies [...]. The rationally unresolvable character of those conflicts reappears in ineliminable disagreements at the level of theory' [MacIntyre, 1994, 292]<sup>7</sup>. These sounds more plausible since the problem of incommensurability seem to pertain first and foremost to some principles embodied in the structures of liberal societies. What does it consist in actually then?

### **3. Incommensurability**

MacIntyre seems to assume that argumentation adduced for a specific moral-cum-political position is usually based on some fundamental premise such as inalienable property rights, universalization or Golden Rule, natural law, right to fair share in basic resources, *raison d'état*, personal freedom etc. The incommensurability of those rival premises manifests itself by the fact that 'we possess no

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<sup>7</sup> See also [MacIntyre, 2007, 244–252].

rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another' [MacIntyre 2007, 8]. It is because these various normative concepts are, as MacIntyre puts it, 'quite different' 'so different' or 'at odds' [MacIntyre, 2007, 8, 246] we are unable to weight the incompatible claims they produce. Yet, it is obvious that there is nothing inherent in any set of concepts which could bring about this very specific kind of difference. Commenting on theories of John Rawls and Robert Nozick, MacIntyre contends that 'our pluralist culture possesses no method of weighing, no rational criterion for deciding between claims based on legitimate entitlement against claims based on need. Thus these two types of claim are indeed, as I suggested, incommensurable, and the metaphor of 'weighing' moral claims is not just inappropriate but misleading' [MacIntyre, 2007, 246]. Nonetheless, it is still not quite clear whether our culture possesses no method of weighing because of incommensurability (difference) of the concepts or it is rather that we call concepts incommensurable because of the lack of the method of their weighing. MacIntyre seems to constantly switch between these two positions. I think that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive options and they may form a kind of virtuous circle, yet it probably would require some pragmatistic theory of meaning, possibly the Wittgensteinian-esque one. As a matter of fact, it would be coherent with the emphasis that MacIntyre seems to eventually put on the practical aspect of meaning. But then, what is the cause of incommensurability other than 'being different' and 'being insoluble'?

MacIntyre points that 'it is easy to see that the different conceptually incommensurable premises of the rival arguments deployed in these debates have a wide variety of historical origins' [MacIntyre, 2007, 10] ranging at least from Aristotle to Marx. They are of course not purely theoretical but rather come from 'those intricate bodies of theory and practice which constitute human cultures, the beliefs of which are articulated by philosophers and theorists only in a partial and selective manner' [MacIntyre, 2007, 10]. MacIntyre suggests then that it is temporal and cultural remoteness that is at the root of incommensurability. It is quite a peculiar conclusion. 'The catalogue of names does suggest how wide and heterogeneous the variety of moral sources is from which we have inherited'[MacIntyre, 2007, 10] contends MacIntyre. Yet, diversity of culture's sources do not necessarily pose exceptional threat to its cohesiveness, which

MacIntyre's philosophical hero, Thomas Aquinas, possibly showed best. Moreover, if 'all those various concepts which inform our moral discourse were originally at home in larger totalities of theory and practice in which they enjoyed a role and function supplied by contexts of which they have now been deprived' [MacIntyre, 2007, 10], those concepts must have also vastly changed their meaning, hence the thesis that incommensurability is based on temporal and cultural distance seem to founder. To put it slightly different: why should something to a large extent devoid of substance be considered incommensurable if the problems with finding a common measure allegedly consist in a divergence of this kind of substance.

Then maybe we should try to treat all moral notions as moral fictions, as something which purports to provide us with an objective and impersonal criterion but it does not [MacIntyre, 2007, 70]. MacIntyre takes two such fictions: 'utility' and 'rights' to show how the incommensurability arises.

"The concept of rights was generated to serve one set of purposes as part of the social invention of the autonomous moral agent; the concept of utility was devised for quite another set of purposes. And both were elaborated in a situation in which substitute artifacts for the concepts of an older and more traditional morality were required, substitutes that had to have a radically innovative character if they were to give even an appearance of performing their new social functions. Hence when claims invoking rights are matched against claims appealing to utility or when either or both are matched against claims based on some traditional concept of justice, it is not surprising that there is no rational way of deciding which type of claim is to be given priority or how one is to be weighed against the other. Moral incommensurability is itself the product of a particular historical conjunction' [MacIntyre, 2007, 70].

In my opinion, however, we are presented here rather with the pretence of an argument. The actual essence of the argument is 'serving quite different sets of purposes'. I cannot see however, how it could unfailingly entail incommensurability. It seems perfectly viable that notions like rights, needs, utility and justice could function in a coherent theory even though each of them serves a different function. It is true that many philosophers had put too much trust in one of these notions but I believe that it shows mainly their failure to properly reflect social practice. It is also obvious that there might occur temporary difficulties in reconciling two or more different notions which requires

accommodating social practice and thus also changing the meaning of those notions, but unless one is committed to the theory of meaning devoid of pragmatic element – as MacIntyre is not, I believe – there seem to be nothing inherently incommensurable in even ‘very different notions’<sup>8</sup>.

## **Conclusions**

My first conclusion from these considerations is rather simple. I think that at the heart of MacIntyre’s argument lies the assumption that every individualistic account of justice is bound to fail; one should bear that in mind while analysing his arguments, otherwise they might seem severely irrelevant from time to time. I also think that to some extent he is right. Still the question is – taking it very roughly – where to draw a line between individualistic and communal element and how to depict them to do justice to existing practices and to fruitfully focus them at the same time. It seems that MacIntyre extends this line so far in the direction of the communal that in consequence he pushes the considerable part of contemporary moral practice down into the sphere of irrationality and/or emotivism, what he in a sense openly admits. Does he encourage us to display this kind of sincerity? I believe that in a sense he does and in this he resembles his great opponent, Friedrich Nietzsche, even though he does not want us to affirm this status. The second conclusion is that MacIntyre can still reasonably contend that liberal debates and theories cannot be deemed rational since they present, promote and in fact impose pervert and impoverished conception of the human life, despite their declared neutrality [MacIntyre, 1988, 336, 343–345]. The lack of neutrality from liberalism and its strong and not uncommonly destructive influence on social tissue is in fact admitted by many liberal thinkers. Yet, even if one admitted that liberalism has its own comprehensive conceptions of good and human nature, liberalism still can be considered globally irrational – according to MacIntyre’s conception of rationality – only

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Mason while arguing against MacIntyre’s account of incommensurability focuses on the problem of intimate interrelation between all respective parts of every theory (or language, speaking more generally) which makes the concept of any belief being basic questionable [Mason, 1994, 230–238].

from the point of view of some other rationality. In this case it is the Aristotelian-Thomistic one. But of course MacIntyre needs to prove that his version of Thomism is the 'most rational rationality' not only from its own point of view but that it is just rational and truth. That is why he takes up the project of rational rivalry of traditions of inquiry<sup>9</sup>. To assess its merits is a separate and laborious task. Here I would only like to suggest that problems with some of MacIntyre's arguments, which I have tried to show above, should render us more careful while dealing with the problems of rationality and irrationality in terms of emotivism. I would not want to discredit MacIntyre's brilliant insights into the nature of modernity at any rate. Still I believe that we are in need of more nuanced account of supposed presence of emotivism in our culture with improvements both on the side of meaning and use.

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<sup>9</sup> See *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* [MacIntyre, 1988] esp. chapters I, XVIII-XX and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* [MacIntyre, 1990] esp. chapters I, VI-X.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Some Problems of Alasdair MacIntyre's 'Emotivism Thesis'**

In this article Alasdair MacIntyre's thesis concerning emotivist use of moral utterances in contemporary liberal societies is analysed. One tries to show that it needs further clarification since at least three elements of MacIntyre's argument seem to pose certain problems; these are: 'discussion halt' as the source of emotivism, comprehensive doctrines as premises of respective arguments in liberal debates and the problem of incommensurability. These three problematic elements are discussed and interrelations between them are adumbrated.

**KEYWORDS:** MacIntyre, emotivism, incommensurability, meaning, use, liberalism, morality, justice

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** MacIntyre, emotywizm, niewspółmierność, znaczenie, użycie, liberalizm, moralność, sprawiedliwość